

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Vincent John Hall,  
*aka Vincent J. Hall,*  
*Formerly #281021,*

Plaintiff,

vs.

James David Watson Esq.; and  
Detective Tracy Finklea,

Defendants.

) C/A No. 6:06-3110-RBH-WMC

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) **Report and Recommendation**

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Plaintiff is a pre-trial detainee at the Dillon County Detention Center. He has filed this matter pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against a detective (Finklea) with the Dillon County Sheriff's Department, and his court-appointed lawyer (Watson). He alleges Watson was ineffective at the preliminary hearing, and he claims Finklea committed perjury. Plaintiff alleges he is falsely imprisoned. He asks that the charges be dismissed, or in the alternative that he be granted a new preliminary hearing. He also seeks damages.

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act. The review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 112 S.Ct. 1728, 118 L.Ed.2d 340, 60 U.S.L.W. 4346 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-325, (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); Nasim v. Warden, Maryland House of Correction, 64 F.3d 951, (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1995)(*en banc*), *cert. denied*, Nasim v. Warden, Maryland House of Correction, 516 U.S. 1177 (1996); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); and Boyce v. Alizaduh, 595 F.2d 948 (4th Cir. 1979). *Pro se* complaints are held

to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir.), *cert. denied*, Leeke v. Gordon, 439 U.S. 970 (1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. See Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 9 (1980); and Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. Fine v. City of New York, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2nd Cir. 1975). However, even under this less stringent standard, the complaint submitted in the above-captioned case is subject to summary dismissal. The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. Weller v. Department of Social Services, 901 F.2d 387, (4th Cir. 1990).

In this judicial circuit, it is also well settled that a witness in a state court proceeding cannot be sued under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 because a witness does not act under color of state law, which is a jurisdictional requirement for a § 1983 suit. Burke v. Miller, 580 F.2d 108, 109-110 & n. 3 (4th Cir. 1978), *cert. denied*, 440 U.S. 930 (1979). See also Kincaid v. Eberle, 712 F.2d 1023 (7th Cir.)(police officer who testifies before a grand jury has absolute immunity), *cert. denied*, 464 U.S. 1018 (1983). Moreover, all persons who testified in any judicial proceedings relating to the plaintiff's conviction have absolute immunity in an action for damages brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See Briscoe v. LaHue, 460 U.S. 325, 327-346 (1983); and Lowman v. Town of Concord, *supra*, 1995 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 3041, at \*10-\*13 (collecting cases). For this reason, defendant Finklea would not be subject to a suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

Attorney Watson is also entitled to summary dismissal because he has not acted under color of state law. In order to state a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a

plaintiff must allege that: (1) the defendant(s) deprived him or her of a federal right, and (2) did so under color of state law. Gomez v. Toledo, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980). An attorney, whether retained, court-appointed, or a public defender, does not act under color of state law, which is a jurisdictional prerequisite for any civil action brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See Deas v. Potts, 547 F.2d 800 (4th Cir. 1976)(private attorney); Hall v. Quillen, 631 F.2d 1154, 1155-1156 & nn. 2-3 (4th Cir. 1980), *cert. denied*, 454 U.S. 1141 (1982)(court-appointed attorney); and Polk County v. Dodson, 454 U.S. 312, 317-324 & nn. 8-16 (1981)(public defender).

The district court in Hall v. Quillen, *supra*, had disposed of the case against a physician and a court-appointed attorney on grounds of immunity. In affirming the district court's order, the Court of Appeals, however, indicated that lower courts should first determine whether state action occurred:

\* \* \* But immunity as a defense only becomes a relevant issue in a case such as this if the court has already determined affirmatively that the action of the defendant represented state action. This is so because state action is an essential preliminary condition to § 1983 jurisdiction, and a failure to find state action disposes of such an action adversely to the plaintiff. \* \* \*

Hall v. Quillen, 631 F.2d at 1155 (citations omitted). See *a/so* Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co., 457 U.S. 922, 936 (1982)("Careful adherence to the 'state action' requirement . . . also avoids imposing on the State, its agencies or officials, responsibility for conduct for which they cannot fairly be blamed.").

Insofar as the plaintiff's pre-trial detention and pre-trial proceedings are concerned, the § 1983 complaint is subject to summary dismissal because a right of action with respect to the plaintiff's detention and pending criminal proceedings has not yet accrued. See Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477 (1994):

We hold that, in order to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, or for other harm whose unlawfulness would

render a conviction or sentence invalid, . . . a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such a determination, or called into question by a federal court's issuance of a writ of habeas corpus, 28 U.S.C. § 2254. A claim for damages bearing that relationship to a conviction or sentence that has not been so invalidated is not cognizable under § 1983. Thus, when a state prisoner seeks damages in a § 1983 suit, the district court must consider whether a judgment in favor of the plaintiff would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction or sentence; if it would, the complaint must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated.

See *also* Schafer v. Moore, 46 F.3d 43 (8th Cir., January 27, 1995)("Therefore, in light of Heck, the complaint was properly dismissed for failure to state a claim."); and Woods v. Candela, 47 F.3d 545, (2nd Cir. 1995)(plaintiff's conviction reversed by state court in 1993; hence, civil rights action timely filed), *cert. denied*, Candela v. Woods, 516 U.S. 808 (1995). See *also* Brooks v. City of Winston-Salem, N.C., 85 F.3d 178 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1996). Accord Smith v. Holtz, 879 F. Supp. 435 (M.D.Pa., March 24, 1995); Burnside v. Mathis, 2004 WL 2944092 (D.S.C. 2004).

Although the decision in Heck v. Humphrey concerned a conviction, its rationale is also applicable to pre-trial detainees. See Nelson v. Murphy, 44 F.3d 497 (7th Cir. 1995)("[A]n inmate already participating in state litigation must make his stand there rather than attempt the equivalent of federal-defense removal by filing an independent § 1983 suit."); Norris v. Super Cab Co., 1994 WESTLAW® 665193 (N.D.Cal., November 15, 1994); and Daniel v. Ruph, 1994 WESTLAW® 589352 (N.D.Cal., October 12, 1994).

In Daniel v. Ruph, *supra*, a district court applied the holding in Heck v. Humphrey to a pre-trial detainee:

In this case, plaintiff seeks damages under § 1983 based on a violation of his Sixth Amendment right to put on a meaningful defense. A judgment in favor of the plaintiff on that claim would imply the invalidity of his ongoing criminal proceedings. If plaintiff were successful in showing that he had been denied his constitutional right to prepare his defense, any conviction which flowed from that denial would be invalidated. Therefore, the instant allegations fail

to state a cognizable claim under § 1983 and are DISMISSED without prejudice. \* \* \*

Daniel v. Ruph, *supra*, 1994 WESTLAW® 589352 (footnote following quotation omitted).

In an earlier case, Norris v. Patsy, 1994 WESTLAW® 443456 (N.D.Cal., July 29, 1994), the court noted that, under Heck v. Humphrey, *supra*, "[a] judgment in favor of the plaintiff here would imply the invalidity of pending state criminal proceedings which have not already been invalidated; . . . therefore, any request for damages pertinent to said proceedings is premature and must be DISMISSED."

Also on point is Hudson v. Chicago Police Department, 860 F. Supp. 521 (N.D.Ill. 1994), where the Honorable Marvin E. Aspen, United States District Judge, ruled that the complaint was subject to dismissal under Heck v. Humphrey. Judge Aspen, however, noted that the plaintiff could bring § 1983 action at a later date if a cause of action had accrued. Judge Aspen also held that "federal courts will not entertain a claim for damages under § 1983 if disposition of the claim would entail ruling on issues in dispute in pending state proceedings." *Accord* Babcock v. Collord, *supra*, 1994 WESTLAW® 374528 (complaints subject to dismissal under Heck v. Humphrey can be dismissed under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(d)).

Heck v. Humphrey is controlling in the above-captioned case because the events at issue in this case took place after Heck v. Humphrey was decided. In any event, Heck v. Humphrey would apply retroactively. See Hooper v. Anderson, 50 F.3d 14 (9th Cir., January 10, 1995)(opinion on rehearing by panel; Heck v. Humphrey applies retroactively), *replacing* unpublished opinion reported in Hooper v. Anderson, 37 F.3d 1505 (9th Cir., October 6, 1994); and Smith v. Holtz, *supra* (plaintiff's Rule 60(b) motion granted because of decision in Heck v. Humphrey).

Absent extraordinary circumstances, federal district courts are not authorized to interfere with a State's pending criminal proceedings. See, e.g., Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37, 44 (1971); Taylor v. Taintor, 83 U.S. 366, 370 & n. 8 (1873);\* Harkrader v. Wadley, 172 U.S. 148, 169-170 (1898); and Cinema Blue of Charlotte, Inc. v. Gilchrist, 887 F.2d 49, 50-53 (4th Cir. 1989), *cert. denied*, 494 U.S. 1030 (1990). In Cinema Blue of Charlotte, Inc. v. Gilchrist, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit ruled that federal district courts should abstain from constitutional challenges to state judicial proceedings, no matter how meritorious, if the federal claims have been or could be presented in an ongoing state judicial proceeding. Cinema Blue of Charlotte, Inc. v. Gilchrist, *supra*, 887 F.2d at 52. See also Bonner v. Circuit Court of St. Louis, 526 F.2d 1331, 1336 (8th Cir. 1975)(*en banc*), *cert. denied*, 424 U.S. 946 (1976). In Bonner v. Circuit Court of St. Louis, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit pointed out that federal constitutional claims are cognizable in both state courts and in federal courts: "Congress and the federal courts have consistently recognized that federal courts should permit state courts to try state cases, and that, where constitutional issues arise, state court judges are fully competent to handle them subject to Supreme Court review."

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the complaint in the above-captioned case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. See Denton v. Hernandez, *supra*; Neitzke v. Williams, *supra*; Haines v. Kerner, *supra*; Brown

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\*Although the Supreme Court of the United States has not overruled Taylor v. Taintor, an unrelated portion of the decision in Taylor v. Taintor, which concerned the right of sureties to apprehend principals, has been superannuated by statute in Texas. See Green v. State, 829 S.W.2d 222, 223 (Tex. Crim. App. 1992)("However, *Taylor* is not the law in Texas."), *affirming* Green v. State, 785 S.W.2d 955 (Tex. App. Fort Worth 1990).

v. Briscoe, 998 F.2d 201, 202-204 & n. \* (4th Cir. 1993), *replacing* unpublished opinion originally tabled at 993 F.2d 1535 (4th Cir. 1993); Boyce v. Alizaduh, *supra*; Todd v. Baskerville, *supra*, 712 F.2d at 74; 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A [the court shall review, as soon as practicable after docketing, prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to any grounds for dismissal].

s/William M. Catoe  
United States Magistrate Judge

November 16, 2006

Greenville, South Carolina

**The plaintiff's attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.**

**Notice of Right to File Objections to Magistrate Judge's "Report and Recommendation"**  
**&**  
**The Serious Consequences of a Failure to Do So**

The parties are hereby notified that any objections to the attached Report and Recommendation (or Order and Recommendation) must be filed within ten (10) days of the date of service. 28 U.S.C. § 636 and Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6. A magistrate judge makes only a recommendation, and the authority to make a final determination in this case rests with the United States District Judge. See Mathews v. Weber, 423 U.S. 261, 270-271 (1976); and Estrada v. Witkowski, 816 F. Supp. 408, 410, 1993 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 3411 (D.S.C. 1993).

During the ten-day period for filing objections, but not thereafter, a party must file with the Clerk of Court specific, written objections to the Report and Recommendation, if he or she wishes the United States District Judge to consider any objections. Any written objections must *specifically identify* the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made *and* the basis for such objections. See Keeler v. Pea, 782 F. Supp. 42, 43-44, 1992 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 8250 (D.S.C. 1992); and Oliverson v. West Valley City, 875 F. Supp. 1465, 1467, 1995 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 776 (D. Utah 1995). Failure to file written objections shall constitute a waiver of a party's right to further judicial review, including appellate review, if the recommendation is accepted by the United States District Judge. See United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91, 94 & n. 4 (4th Cir.), *cert. denied*, Schronce v. United States, 467 U.S. 1208 (1984); and Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841, 845-847 & nn. 1-3 (4th Cir. 1985). Moreover, if a party files specific objections to a portion of a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation, but does not file specific objections to other portions of the Report and Recommendation, that party waives appellate review of the portions of the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation to which he or she did not object. In other words, a party's failure to object to one issue in a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation precludes that party from subsequently raising that issue on appeal, even if objections are filed on other issues. Howard v. Secretary of HHS, 932 F.2d 505, 508-509, 1991 U.S. App. LEXIS® 8487 (6th Cir. 1991). See also Praylow v. Martin, 761 F.2d 179, 180 n. 1 (4th Cir.) (party precluded from raising on appeal factual issue to which it did not object in the district court), *cert. denied*, 474 U.S. 1009 (1985). In Howard, *supra*, the Court stated that general, non-specific objections are *not* sufficient:

A general objection to the entirety of the [magistrate judge's] report has the same effects as would a failure to object. The district court's attention is not focused on any specific issues for review, thereby making the initial reference to the [magistrate judge] useless. \* \* \* This duplication of time and effort wastes judicial resources rather than saving them, and runs contrary to the purposes of the Magistrates Act. \* \* \* We would hardly countenance an appellant's brief simply objecting to the district court's determination without explaining the source of the error.

Accord Lockert v. Faulkner, 843 F.2d 1015, 1017-1019 (7th Cir. 1988), where the Court held that the appellant, who proceeded *pro se* in the district court, was barred from raising issues on appeal that he did not specifically raise in his objections to the district court:

Just as a complaint stating only 'I complain' states no claim, an objection stating only 'I object' preserves no issue for review. \* \* \* A district judge should not have to guess what arguments an objecting party depends on when reviewing a [magistrate judge's] report.

See also Branch v. Martin, 886 F.2d 1043, 1046, 1989 U.S. App. LEXIS® 15,084 (8th Cir. 1989) ("no de novo review if objections are untimely or general"), which involved a *pro se* litigant; and Goney v. Clark, 749 F.2d 5, 7 n. 1 (3rd Cir. 1984) ("plaintiff's objections lacked the specificity to trigger *de novo* review"). This notice, hereby, apprises the plaintiff of the consequences of a failure to file specific, written objections. See Wright v. Collins, *supra*; and Small v. Secretary of HHS, 892 F.2d 15, 16, 1989 U.S. App. LEXIS® 19,302 (2nd Cir. 1989). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections addressed as follows:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk  
 United States District Court  
 Post Office Box 10768  
 Greenville, South Carolina 29603